

NC Highway 68 Scenic Corridor Plan

INTRODUCTION

The NC Highway 68 corridor is an important north-south thoroughfare that connects many of the surrounding office buildings, light manufacturing/industrial areas, and the Interstate 40 corridor with Greensboro, High Point, and the Piedmont Triad International Airport. The corridor not only serves as an essential transportation link for motorists in the Greensboro metropolitan area, but it also provides the central part of the State with access to the Piedmont Triad International Airport. With its central geographical location and proximity to major transportation facilities, the area surrounding NC 68 has been experiencing rapid growth. In order to preserve the quality of this significant gateway to Greensboro, it is imperative to consider alternative methods of maintaining the high quality of appearance in this area.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF REPORT

The NC 68 corridor has been identified by the City of Greensboro as a potential Scenic Corridor Overlay District, which supplements the requirements of the underlying zoning districts. Scenic corridor overlay district regulations are a necessary and appropriate method to preserve and enhance the appearance and operational characteristics of certain designated roadways. For the purposes of this study, the following elements were surveyed along the NC 68 corridor: existing land uses, signage (type, location, spacing, number, and size), screening of parking lots, outdoor storage, and exterior building materials. There is also a considerable amount of transportation planning occurring in the area of NC 68, including a corridor study conducted by NCDOT. The study addresses access along NC 68 and collector streets parallel to NC 68 in an effort to improve travel mobility along this corridor. Using this report as a guideline, transportation issues were identified and included as well.

DEFINING THE CORRIDOR

This study area measured 1,500 feet to the east and west of the NC 68 centerline. Due to the length of NC 68, the corridor was divided into three sections for discussion. The sections are as follows: 1) Pleasant Ridge Road to West Market Street, 2) West Market Street to I-40, 3) I-40 to Gallimore Dairy Road.

PLANNING ISSUES

Planning issues identified as being important are listed on the following pages, with each section including potential land use, signage, aesthetic, and transportation issues.

Pleasant Ridge Road to West Market Street

Land Use: This portion of NC 68 is primarily composed of vacant, residential, and light industrial/office land uses. The majority of the light industrial/office land uses are along Regional Road North and Pleasant Ridge Road, including the Enterprise Office Park complex currently under construction on Brigham Road. Near the intersection of West Market Street and NC 68, particularly along Burgess Road, there is a substantial amount of industrial land uses mixed with some office uses.

Signage: Along the eastern side of NC 68 there is a prominent billboard sign located just south of the terminus of Airport Parkway.

Aesthetic: Near the intersection of NC 68 and Pleasant Ridge Road there is a small storage building complex primarily constructed of aluminum which would be in view from NC 68 if an adjacent residential house were torn down. There are some screening issues with the Market America and US Label Parcels. Both of these parcels are visible from NC 68, particularly the US Label parking lot that is prominent when viewed from the corridor. Along the eastern side of NC 68 near the intersection of West Market Street, some of the buildings and parking lots belonging to Air Park North are visible from NC 68. Some of the other properties in the Burgess Road area also have parking lots and loading docks visible from the local streets around NC 68. There is also a potential screening issue with the property recently vacated by Larry's Mobile Homes.

Transportation: This portion of NC 68 includes TIP Project R-2413, which provides for a connector between US 220 and NC 68 just north of Pleasant Ridge Road, with an interchange to be constructed at Pleasant Ridge Road. The project is in the design phase with the widening of US 220 NC 68 in Rockingham County to the proposed 68/220 Connector scheduled for construction in fiscal years 2002, 2003, and 2004. The schedule for the remaining Connector portion of the project includes right-of-way acquisition in FY 2008 with construction currently unscheduled. The expected open-to-traffic date is 2014, but this is subject to change. This project is being designed to conform to Interstate standards, as it is to be a portion of I-73.

Conditional Use Zoning: There are currently four properties with Conditional Use Permits. Each property is zoned CU-LI with varying conditions. Two of the properties prohibit billboards, while the remaining properties limit land uses and require additional landscaping.

West Market Street to I-40

Land Use: Along the west side of NC 68, situated around Triad Center Drive, there is an area consisting primarily of office land uses mixed with a few light industrial uses bordered by industrially zoned vacant land to the north. The eastern portion of the corridor includes a substantial amount of vacant land that is currently zoned Corporate Park. Near the intersection of I-40, including Regional Road South and Burnt Poplar Road, there is a heavy concentration of commercial and industrial land uses.

Signage: There are two billboard signs located on the western side and one on the eastern side of NC 68, just south of the West Market Street intersection. There are also several nonconforming signs located in the area of Regional Road North (Sterling Trucks and Piedmont Auto Center) and Burnt Poplar Road (Days Inn, Mr. Omelet, and Kenworth Truck Sales). The signs located on the commercial properties along Burnt Poplar Road are exceptionally large in size and height. In contrast, the signage for the properties located along Triad Center Drive (Analog Devices) and Centerport Drive (Embassy Suites and Homewood Suites) is modest in height and size.

Aesthetic: There is a significant amount of vacant land along this portion of NC 68, particularly just south of the West Market Street intersection. Many of the potential screening and building materials issues near the intersection of I-40 are not visible from NC 68. To the west of NC 68 (and just north of I-40), Centerpoint Office Park has no screening issues and is hidden behind berms and well landscaped detention ponds. On the eastern portion of NC 68, along the portion of Regional Road North included in the overlay district, there are several businesses with aesthetic issues visible from many of the surrounding local streets. The Phillips 66 gas station located at the corner of Regional Road and Burnt Poplar Road has gas pumps located in front of the building. There is also a lack of sufficient screening for any of the commercial parking lots or outdoor storage areas along Regional Road North. Several businesses, including Sterling Trucks and John Deere Equipment, use metal buildings with loading docks oriented toward the street.

Transportation: This portion of NC 68 includes TIP Project R-2611, which calls for West Market Street to be widened to a multi-lane facility from SR 2007 in Colfax to NC 68. Based on the current TIP, planning for this project is not due for completion until fiscal year 2002 with construction expected in FY 2008. GDOT along with NCDOT are also planning to widen this portion of NC 68 from Gallimore Dairy Road to West Market Street with construction anticipated for 2003.

Currently NCDOT is conducting a study to construct an interchange to replace the current intersection of NC 68 / Triad Center Drive, TIP Project W-4408. The proposed design is under review to account for potential impacts to an office development approved by TRC in 2000.

Conditional Use Zoning: There are presently no properties along this portion of NC 68 with Conditional Use Permits.

I-40 to Gallimore Dairy Road

Land Use: This portion of NC 68 includes the majority of commercial land uses for the entire corridor. Near the intersection of I-40, there is a substantial cluster of commercial land uses with intermittent commercial, vacant, residential, and light industrial/office uses continuing south along the corridor. On the western side of the corridor, along Thorndike Road and National Service Road, there is an office park mixed with some commercial and industrial uses.

Signage: There are many potential signage issues along this portion of NC 68, including three prominent billboard signs located along the corridor as well as one off Albert Pick Road. A conglomeration of nonconforming signs exists on the commercial properties along Regional

Road South near the intersection of Albert Pick Road (McDonalds, Shoney's, Ramada Inn, and Mobil Gas). In contrast, the signage for the properties located along Thorndike Road (RF Micro Devices) and National Service Road (Hampton Inn and Air Park West) is modest in height and size.

Aesthetic: This portion of NC 68 has several screening issues, with the potential for more issues as future development occurs. South of the NC 68 and I-40 intersection, along the western side of the corridor, parking lots for the two banks and some of the hotels near Thorndike Road are easily visible from NC 68. Near the intersection of Regional Road South and Albert Pick Road, many of the commercial properties have screening issues, but because of scrub brush in the highway right-of-way, the issues are not visible from NC 68. However, for those parcels not veiled by the scrub brush (Motel 6), the lack of parking lot screening is obvious from the corridor. Continuing along the eastern side of NC 68 at the intersection of Hickory Ridge Road, the surrounding commercial development including Subway, TCBY, Taco Bell, and a small strip center each have parking lots that are visible from the corridor. The Napa Auto Parts building, located at the corner of NC 68 and Gallimore Dairy Road, does not provide adequate screening of the large parking lot nor of the loading dock areas located on the northern side of the building. Finally, the Wilco Gas Station, also located at the corner of NC 68 and Gallimore Dairy Road, has a metal canopy and gas pumps that are all in view of the corridor.

Transportation: This portion of NC 68 includes TIP Project I-2201, which calls for I-40 to be upgraded to add additional travel lanes in both east and west directions. Completion is expected in late 2002, although an interchange upgrade at NC 68 was not included as a part of this project. The current official I-73 route runs along the NC 68 alignment from north of the airport to I-40. However the City and State realize that a freeway to freeway type interchange in this location would be impractical given area land development. The I-73 route is under study, with the current preferred concept being routing I-73 via Bryan Boulevard to the Greensboro Western Urban Loop.

GDOT is planning with NCDOT to widen this portion of NC 68 from Gallimore Dairy Road to West Market Street. Also GDOT, the City of High Point, and NCDOT are planning for the creation of parallel collector streets on either side of NC 68. The east side of NC 68 involves Regional Road being extended to Gallimore Dairy Road. The west side of NC 68 involves the extension of Pegg Road over I-40.

Conditional Use Zoning: This portion of NC 68 has a significant number of properties with Conditional Use Permits. Of the twenty properties, twelve are zoned CU-HB, six are zoned CU-LI, and there is one property each zoned CU-HI and CU-CP. Some of the conditions limit permitted uses, require greater landscaping, restrict access, restrict signage, and contain other conditions that are similar to the provisions of a scenic corridor. Billboards are prohibited on thirteen of the properties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are in response to an examination of the issues applicable to the NC 68 corridor. The implementation of the aesthetic recommendations will ensure that the corridor, which could be considered the most important entryway into Greensboro, will continue to enjoy the best possible type of development. The intention of the land use recommendation is to ensure that the corridor develops as a corporate office gateway to the city, and that development is restricted to strategically placed, well laid out mixed uses. Finally, the transportation recommendations are intended to prevent significant deterioration of traffic capacity on NC 68, and to improve the negative impacts of additional development on future traffic flows.

Aesthetic Recommendations

Signage: Develop restrictive regulations that govern the height, size, illumination, and number of signs allowed on a parcel. Restrictions should also prohibit the following signs: outdoor advertising signs, changeable copy signs (excluding fuel pricing and church identification signs), electronic changeable copy signs (excluding electronic time and temperature signs not exceeding 15 square feet of copy area), ground surface signs, and neon signs (not including those attached to a window).

Freestanding signs shall only display the name, trademark, and registered logo; except for fuel pricing signs that can also display vehicular fuel product and prices. Freestanding signage shall be limited to 1 per street frontage, not to exceed 6 feet in height for lots with less than 200 feet of street frontage; for lots exceeding 200 feet of frontage, height shall not exceed 15 feet. The maximum area for freestanding signage shall be limited to 50 square feet for single businesses; 90 square feet for two or more businesses <25,000 square feet; and, 135 square feet for two or more businesses >25,000 square feet. For lots adjoining the I-40 right-of-way, or lots located on a service road that physically adjoins the I-40 right-of-way, freestanding signage shall conform to the underlying zoning districts size and height requirements as outlined in Table 30-5-5-2.

Attached (wall) signs shall be limited to 1 per wall with a maximum of 7.5% of the wall area not to exceed 100 square feet. The height of the sign shall not exceed the top of the wall.

Illumination of all signs shall be limited to cut-out letter and indirect lighting. In commercial districts backlit wall signage shall be permitted, however, signs with panels over fluorescent lighting shall be opaque.

Screening: Establish guidelines that require parking areas located on lots adjacent to NC 68 to be screened from view of the street with planting yards, berms, or fencing. There should also be regulations requiring screening for outside storage areas and garbage containers (dumpsters). Requiring convenience stores to locate gas pumps behind the principal structure should effectively screen the pumps from view of the street; however, if fuel pumps are not located to the rear of the building additional landscaping shall be required. Finally, grade separation will have to be taken into account in addressing screening issues.

Appearance: Develop regulations to restrict the use of specific types of corrugated metal-sided buildings that are visible from NC 68. In addition to restricting types of building materials, loading docks or unsightly building appurtenances should not be visible from the street either. It is also advisable to require all building color schemes to consist of natural earth tones, white, black, or shades of gray to help maintain a visually appealing standard throughout the corridor. This includes prohibiting garish or unusual patterns in a building color scheme and encouraging buildings to blend in with natural surroundings. Finally, there needs to be thresholds in place for lighting levels of commercial properties along the corridor. This is particularly applicable to convenience stores and gasoline service stations.

Interim Land Use Recommendations

Commercial Development: Encourage strategically located, well laid out mixed use development along the NC 68 corridor. This would include developments consisting of corporate office, warehouse, and commercial land uses; however, the opportunity to site attractively designed and strategically located land uses is undermined if strip commercial development is allowed in the corridor. For this reason, and because such development often has a negative effect on aesthetic quality and traffic movement, strip development should be discouraged in lieu of mixed use development.

Transportation Recommendations

Parallel Collector Systems: There is a need to develop a parallel collector system to serve development and the local travel demands in the immediate area. Once a plan is developed and approved, critical movements along NC 68 can be eliminated or converted to right turn only movements, allowing the corridor to be upgraded to an urban expressway. The NC 68 Corridor Study (NCDOT 2000) found that the creation of continuous parallel collector roadways to be the most important opportunity to preserve traffic capacity on NC 68. Greensboro, High Point, and NCDOT are currently in the planning phases of addressing this need.

Encourage TDM Usage: Transportation demand management techniques should be utilized whenever possible to reduce vehicular trips along the corridor. Other modes of travel should be encouraged and accommodated where possible along the corridor. Regional transit alternatives are under study including coordination of local transit routing and schedules and possible regional express bus service connecting High Point to the Airport Area along the NC 68 Corridor.

Access Restrictions: To minimize the speed differential between slowing or turning vehicles and through traffic, direct access to NC 68 should be by temporary access only. Direct full movement access should be avoided/eliminated, where possible, and alternate access should be provided if available. Access management requirements should be a priority, and must be pursued in the permitting of new development in the corridor. See the following access management recommendations.

NC 68 Access Management Recommendations

New non-residential developments located adjacent to each other should be required to provide cross access so that parking lots and driveways are connected.

Encouraging cross-access between adjacent developments reduces the number of vehicles that are required to re-enter the major roadway. Keeping the additional turning traffic off the major roadway improves its efficient and safe operation.

Minimum lot frontages should be required for non-residential developments.

The access management standards recommended in Table 1 of this report include a 400-foot spacing between non-residential driveways. In order to enforce this spacing, adjacent commercial properties would need to have well over 200 feet of frontage. Encouraging minimum frontage will keep driveways from being spaced too closely.

Larger developments such as shopping centers should be required to provide access to outparcels.

Providing cross-access to outparcels encourages internal traffic circulation and keeps unnecessary turning traffic off major roadways.

Implement right turn deceleration lanes for developments generating significant peak hour traffic as determined through the site access/traffic impact study process.

Right turn deceleration lanes minimize the effect of slowing traffic that is exiting the traffic stream on the major roadway. This improves safety and keeps the major roadway operating at speeds that are more desirable. Where deemed necessary, deceleration lanes should be constructed within the property of the proposed development.

Right-in/Right-out only driveways should be encouraged as secondary access for non-residential developments.

When a development requests more than one driveway, the feasibility of a right-in/right-out driveway as a secondary access needs to be evaluated and encouraged.

For developments that have frontage on both a major road (major or minor thoroughfare) and a side street (local or collector), primary access via the side street should be encouraged.

Restricting major road access to service entrances or right-in/right-out driveways where side street access is available reduces the impact of turning vehicles on the major road. It may also eliminate the cost for a developer associated with constructing a deceleration lane on the major road.

Table 1: Access Management Standards

Minimum Driveway Spacing:	
<u>Frontage (feet)</u>	<u>No. of Driveways Allowed</u>
500	1
500 – 999	2
> 1000	3
<u>Development Type</u>	<u>Spacing (feet)</u>
Residential	100
Non-residential	400
Corner Clearance*:	
	<u>Distance (feet)</u>
Major/Minor Thoroughfare/Interchange Ramp/Local	500
Street/Side Street	200
Median:	
Minimum Spacing Between Median Openings	100 feet

* Minimum distance between driveway and intersection.